NOAA Backgrounder

Office of Marine and Aviation Operations

Who We Are

Since NOAA's beginning, a large percentage of its oceanographic, atmospheric, hydrographic, fisheries and coastal data has been collected on NOAA ships and aircraft. This fleet of platforms is managed and operated by the Office of Marine and Aviation Operations, an office made up of civilians and officers of the NOAA Commissioned Corps (a uniformed service of the United States). In addition to research and monitoring activities critical to NOAA's mission, NOAA ships and aircraft provide immediate response capabilities for unpredictable events, such as recovery and search efforts after the plane crashes of TWA Flight 800, John F. Kennedy Jr., and Egyptair Flight 990; damage assessment after major oil spills such as the *Exxon Valdez,* Persian Gulf War and *New Carissa;* and several major hurricanes during the 1998 and 1999 seasons.

NOAA Corps officers, in addition to managing and operating ships and aircraft, are also scientists and engineers. These officers provide NOAA with a useful blend of operational, management and technical skills that support NOAA's science and surveying programs both ashore and at sea. Corps officers serve in NOAA's research laboratories and program offices throughout the nation and in remote locations around the world; for example, an officer serves as station chief at the South Pole, Antarctica.

What We Do

The Office of Marine and Aviation Operations operates and maintains the largest fleet of research and survey ships operated by a federal agency. The fleet ranges from large oceanographic research vessels capable of exploring the world's deepest ocean, to smaller ships responsible for charting the shallow bays and inlets of the United States. The fleet supports a wide range of marine activities, including fisheries research, nautical charting/mapping, and long-range ocean and climate studies. Few ships in the United States can conduct joint operations of fishery stock assessment and oceanography as do NOAA's fishery research vessels.

The Office of Marine and Aviation Operations also manages a fleet of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. These aircraft operate throughout the world, providing a wide range of research capabilities—from hurricane prediction research to coastal mapping and charting. Few aircraft outside of NOAA have the structure necessary to carry instrument packages appropriate for NOAA's missions. There are no compa-

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A WORD ABOUT NOAA. . .

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) conducts research and gathers data about the global oceans, atmosphere, space, and sun, and applies this knowledge to science and service that touch the lives of all Americans.

NOAA warns of dangerous weather, charts our seas and skies, guides our use and protection of ocean and coastal resources, and conducts research to improve our understanding and stewardship of the environment which sustains us all.

A Commerce Department agency, NOAA provides these services through five major organizations: the National Weather Service, the National Ocean Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the National Environmental Satellite, Data and Information Service, and Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research; and numerous special program units. In addition, NOAA research and operational activities are supported by the Nation's seventh uniformed service, the NOAA Corps, a commissioned officer corps of men and women who operate NOAA ships and aircraft, and serve in scientific and administrative posts.

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rable aircraft in the commercial fleet to support NOAA's atmospheric and hurricane surveillance/research programs.

To provide ships capable of serving NOAA missions well into the next century, NOAA began a modernization program. Six of the older, less efficient ships have been taken out of service; three new ships have been placed into service since 1996, and several others have gone through extensive upgrades. The condition of the remaining ships in the fleet has improved significantly since the modernization program started and most ships will continue to operate for the next few years. NOAA believes that its fisheries research ships will need to be replaced by modern platforms within the next 10 years, and plans have been made accordingly.

NOAA is fulfilling its ship support needs by complementing NOAA ships with ships from other sources, such as the private sector and the university fleet.

These charters will meet both short- and long-term NOAA needs for oceanography and fisheries research projects. Where practical, NOAA is contracting directly for collection of hydrographic data.

What Are the Benefits?

NOAA's ships and aircraft are flexible, multi-purpose platforms that support a wide range of activities related to weather forecasting and prediction, public safety, navigation and trade, natural resource management and environmental protection. NOAA ships and aircraft are the only such platforms in the United States with the capability of meeting NOAA's program requirements. One such example is the combined fishery-oceanographic research and fishery stock assessment vessels. Under NOAA management, NOAA ships and aircraft are cost-effective and have demonstrated a tremendous safety record and successful mission accomplishment while operating in frequently hazardous environments.

Through the Office of Marine and Aviation Operation's commitment to diligent maintenance, NOAA ships currently operate well beyond the normal service life of comparable research and survey ships. Such commitment has resulted in a cost savings to the taxpayers.

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